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Unit One Choice Board

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### Rainsford as a Developing Character

The character of Rainsford in "The Most Dangerous Game," by Richard Connell, is easily considered a flat character. However, upon rereading "The Most Dangerous Game," it is easy to see that this assumption is wrong. Throughout the story, Rainsford faces tests and trails that cause him to undergo significant changes.

Rainsford does appear flat at first. During his discussion with Whitney on the boat, he displays very few of the hallmarks of a round or dynamic individual; he appears to be a heartless hunter, with little or no other opinions. Whitney essentially argues that the jaguars they are going to hunt in the Amazon have feelings. "You're a big-game hunter, not a philosopher. Who cares how the jaguar feels?" Rainsford rebukes him (68). This conversation paints Rainsford in a very straightforward and flat manner. When the topic shifts to Ship-Trap Island, which they are passing, Whitney is worried that the name might mean more than just superstition. Again, Rainsford is one-sided; he does not seem capable of fear.

The next real look into Rainsford's personality comes after he has arrived on the island and met General Zaroff. Rainsford and the general discuss a variety of topics over dinner, and at first, Rainsford appears as flat as he does in the conversation with Whitney. Rainsford does not seem to question the fact that he has found a château in the middle of the sea and on an apparently deserted island no less! Not only that, but he never wonders why somebody would choose a .22-caliber weapon to take down what would seem to be a large animal. Rainsford is oblivious to the danger he is in. He plays into the flat and stereotypical fearless character we have known up to this point. However, this characterization does not last for

long once he has met General Zaroff. After a bit of small talk regarding hunting, Zaroff begins to hint at his grander scheme. Once Rainford realizes exactly what Zaroff's "new animal" is, he is revolted. "Hunting? Good God, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder" Rainsford exclaims (76). This is the first of several new dimensions to Rainsford's character. He is suddenly a character capable of feeling, and he knows that this "hunt" is wrong. This is only the first realization that will change his character from a flat, almost cardboard-cutout, hunter into a person.

Three basic things are required to bring about a real change in a character: the change must be consistent with the individual's characterization, it must be sufficiently motivated, and there must be enough time for it to take place (165). It has already been established by his "philosophical" conversations with Whitney and Zaroff. In each of these instances something is learned about Rainsford, but in either instance by itself, he is a flat character. Rainsford's round characterization can be seen when these parts are considered together. Now, however, the criteria for true change in a character must be considered.

Rainsford quickly finds himself in extraordinary circumstances. He is trapped, and the only way he can escape is to participate in the hunt, a choice which has killed many others. By definition, this kind of situation makes it almost impossible not to leave a changed man. On the first night, when Rainsford is given his head start into the jungle, he plans the most elaborate trail possible. It would be impossible for Zaroff to follow. His confidence returns for a brief moment. His hope is quickly crushed when Zaroff manages to decipher the trail in no time at all, and also evades the trap that he had planted. This is a dramatic reversal to Rainsford. Suddenly, he is inferior, no long the master hunter, but the hunted. This realization brings into doubt his previous attitudes and views; now he knows exactly how the jaguar feels. His new found fear quickly changes the way he views the game. He is no longer

above killing people, as is shown when his trap kills Ivan, Zaroff's assistant. Both of these fundamental changes are consistent with his character. He is a hunter, and while the tables have been turned, his survival instinct never leaves him, making him able to make the sacrifices and changes of character necessary to live.

"The Most Dangerous Game" takes place over the course of three days. This time frame may seem short, but the circumstances of Rainsford's experience must be considered. Even a short life-and-death experience can change a person forever, but Rainsford is in such a situation for three days. After three days spent being hunted, Rainsford's decision to kill the general comes as no surprise. The character traits that Rainsford is forced to adopt, namely, a lesser sense of morality, a ruthlessness necessary in order to escape, and his "discovery" of fear, lead him to this course of action. The reader would not expect the Rainsford who called Zaroff's game "murder" to then kill a man. Not only one, but two, and with no remorse. The three days spent on the island give Rainsford enough time to make this reversal necessary.

Finally, what is the final, definitive change in the characterization of Rainsford? It is best exemplified by his decision to kill General Zaroff, which is clearly the result of the last three days. This choice can be seen from a number of angles. Rainsford is now a murderer. In the beginning, he was absolutely appalled by the idea of taking another human life. "You have won the game," Zaroff says (85). However, at what cost to his character, his personality? This could be seen as self-sacrifice; after all, Rainsford's rather unsympathetic was established in his conversation with Whitney. In this vein, it is possible that Rainsford has both figuratively and literally ended the hunt. Can he ever be a hunter again, now that he knows what it is to be hunted? An opposing viewpoint could also suggest that, by sleeping in Zaroff's bed, Rainsford has taken up his role, essentially surviving his experience, but only in the most literal sense. Zaroff is Rainsford's foil, but if Rainsford replaces him, has he really

survived? No, his character has been totally reversed; he has become his own worst enemy.

## Works Cited

"The Most Dangerous Game." *Perrines's Literature: Structure, Sound, and Sense*. Eds. Greg Johnson and Thomas Arp. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth, 2006. Print.